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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KISL](#) [IZ](#) [IR](#)
SUBJECT: DHI QAR UNEASILY PREPARES FOR SADRISTS IN
GOVERNING COALITION

Classified By: Senior Advisor Gordon Gray for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

11. (C) Leading Dhi Qar politicians and religious authorities are uneasy with Sadrism participation in an incoming provincial governing coalition with the Prime Minister's State of Law list and ex-Prime Minister Ja'afari's National Reform Trend. In March 8 meetings with visiting Senior Advisor Gordon Gray, political opponents said that Sadrists are more interested in detainee releases and cancellation of arrest warrants than provincial leadership positions. The Deputy Governor from the Da'wa party was hesitant to admit the extent of cooperation with the Sadrists; he and other contacts suggested that the Da'wa-based State of Law coalition will likely hold both the governorship and the Provincial Council (PC) Chair position. All interlocutors expressed support for a gradual U.S. withdrawal and Iraq's continued openness to the outside world, and specifically a continued close relationship with the United States. End summary.

Uneasy Three-way Coalition

12. (C) In separate meetings, Governor Aziz Kadhim Alwan (ISCI) and PC Chair Ihsan Talim (Fadhilah) both confirmed widespread reports that the Da'wa-backed State of Law list, the Sadrism Tayar al-Ahrar list, and Ibrahim Ja'afari's National Reform Trend will form a three-way coalition to govern the province. The Governor and PC Chair, neither of whom will be returning to office, predictably bemoaned the presence of the Sadrists (which they often called a "militia group") in the governing coalition. Sayyid Majeed Jasim, the representative of Grand Ayatollah Sistani in Dhi Qar province, was also skeptical but more positive. He noted that "many of the Sadrists are reasonable" and that all seven of the Sadrists elected were professionals, many of them engineers. Interestingly, the Da'wa Deputy Governor, Ahmed Yasin Taha, was unwilling to say directly that the Sadrists were a confirmed part of the coalition. The Deputy Governor said only that Da'wa was "open to any party that agreed with Da'wa positions" and that the confirmed coalition with Ja'afari's list already amounted to a majority of votes (17 of 31) on the Council.

Sadrists' Real Objectives

13. (C) Deputy Governor Taha, who was re-elected on the State of Law list, was coy on future leadership positions and said only that he might play a role in administration of the province. Sayyid Majeed Jasim and many other Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) contacts have said recently that the latest rumors are that Prime Minister Maliki will appoint an outsider as governor because of disagreement within the

local Da'wa party and because coalition partners have been unable to reach consensus. Ihsan said that Da'wa will take both the governorship and PC chairmanship. In any case, the outgoing Governor and PC Chair said, the Sadrists seem most interested in release of detainees affiliated with Jaysh al-Mahdi and with cancellation of arrest warrants.

¶4. (C) Governor Alwan even claimed that two of the seven elected Sadrists have outstanding warrants. He also claimed that Sadrist Council of Representatives member Baha al-Araji had recently toured a Nasiriyah prison and called for establishment of a commission to investigate physical and psychological abuse. Alwan was particularly concerned because he believed that many ISCI and Badr members in the police, prison guard service, and perhaps the judiciary would be subject to legal claims by Sadrist detainees. The PC Chair, who also was aware of the Araji visit, termed this "interference with the security forces," saying it was part of a strategy to force the release of all Sadrist prisoners. "The Sadrists have never heard of public service," he said. "Their only objective has been to oppose the 'occupiers' and to get their prisoners released."

Endorsement of Democracy, But...

¶5. (C) Each interlocutor confirmed that the outgoing government and PC members will leave without incident. Governor Alwan said he would not take up a position in the new PC, despite winning the most votes of any single candidate, because it would be humiliating to bear the

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insults of the "militias." (The Governor is widely rumored here to have been behind previous assassinations of Sadrist leaders.) Dhi Qar politicians were unanimous in praising Iraq's new democratic system, whatever the result, but the losers vented complaints. The Governor attributed ISCI's loss to Prime Minister Maliki's distribution of public funds, including establishment of tribal support councils, and to the inexperience and lack of sophistication of the Iraqi public. "We are now in the primary school of democracy," he said. "It will be a long time before we get to college." The Fadhilah PC Chair alleged that circumstantial evidence indicated that the results had been rigged. (Comment: We are not aware that any of these claims are true. End comment.) He also said that Iraq's system of counting votes was grossly unfair.

Opening to the Outside World

¶6. (C) All of Gray's interlocutors agreed that Iraq needs to be more open to the outside world to develop its economy and political system. Sayyid Majeed Jasim said his "headquarters" (i.e., the Najaf marja'iyah) had instructed him to meet often with Americans. He noted the importance of continued access to foreign expertise. Deputy Governor Ahmed Taha agreed, noting specifically the success of the PRT's educational programs. Once the new provincial government is formed, Taha said, he would like to discuss some specific ideas for the development of the priority areas of water, electricity, and health.

Suspensions of Iran

¶7. (C) Sayyid Majeed Jasim expressed an ambivalent view of Iran. He said Iraq's history of war with Kuwait and Iran made it incumbent on Iraq to demonstrate its peaceful intentions toward those two countries. He claimed that Iraq would abide faithfully by current border agreements with

Iran, but said the issue of the Shatt al-Arab waterway could potentially inflame relations. PC Chair Ihsan also said that this and other border issues could cause friction with Iran. He claimed a new Iranian dam had dried up a section of Iraqi land along the border. Iraqi politicians' refusal to confront Iran over these issues concerned the average Iraqi, Ihsan said.

Future of U.S.-Iraq Relationship

18. (C) Though they offered little evidence of much prior knowledge of the specifics of the recent Strategic Framework Agreement, Security Agreement, or the President's speech on Iraq at Camp LeJeune, Gray's interlocutors expressed satisfaction with the direction of the U.S.-Iraqi relationship and a strong desire to continue strong ties, especially economic ties. Sayeed Majeed Jasim said that Iraqis, "especially the religious community," applauded President Obama's decision to withdraw from Iraq only slowly and in a way that preserves stability. "We thank you for this and will thank you and throw flowers at you when you leave completely in 2011," he added. The Governor, Deputy Governor, and PC Chair all agreed that the United States should not withdraw abruptly, which could endanger the new relative tranquility in southern Iraq. All the interlocutors also expressed a strong desire for continued close ties with the United States, especially with regard to economics and investment, but did not provide specifics.

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